

DRAFT

Preliminary Focus Group Synopsis



Human Resources Management Systems
Senior Review Committee Meeting
Washington, DC
July 25, 2003

Design Team Research



Design team is collecting data from a broad array of sources; the focus group information is one key source

Background of Focus Groups

- ▶ The design team conducted 54 focus groups across the United States
 - Participants included a diverse representation of DHS employees to obtain perspectives across DHS components, job/series, geographic locations, union/non-union, age, gender, and ethnicity
 - 44 focus groups were with rank and file employees, 10 focus groups were with managers
 - Non-bargaining unit employee participants and supervisors were selected by managers; bargaining unit participants were selected by union representatives
 - Participants were asked to provide their views on “what works” and “what, if anything, could be improved” with respect to the six HR functions under consideration: pay, classification, performance management, labor relations, discipline, and appeals
- ▶ Participants’ dedication to DHS’ mission was deep and impressive; they were eager to provide their perceptions on DHS’ HR functions
- ▶ This document provides a high level overview of recurring themes from these focus group sessions. It is based on a preliminary review of the focus group results and is subject to revision upon completion of a more detailed summary and analysis

Focus Group Participants' Advice to the Design Team

- ▶ Improve the **ability** (e.g., through increased training) and increase the **accountability** of management, which is central to the success of DHS' future HR system
- ▶ Communicate to keep employees **continuously informed** of system progress and changes
- ▶ Move **slowly** and **plan** carefully to ensure **success**
- ▶ Ensure **greater consistency** across DHS personnel systems, but **allow customization and tailoring** to meet workforce needs
- ▶ **Protect** employees' interests by assuring consistency and fairness
- ▶ Don't change **for the sake of** change
- ▶ Don't reduce levels of **pay and benefits** currently in place

Focus Group Themes: Participants' Perceptions

Pay and Classification

- ▶ The current system is a good one
 - Familiar, predictable, and objective
 - Offers built in increases to reward seniority/experience, overtime pay, a well-defined career ladder, etc.
 - Provides flexibility to recognize performance (e.g., QSI, awards)
- ▶ The current system could be improved
 - Provide pay more comparable to the market so it is easier to recruit and retain employees
 - Provide additional pay for special skills and responsibilities
 - Improve equity and consistency regarding grade and pay across series within DHS
 - Address problems with law enforcement retirement eligibility, high cost of living in certain locations, and overtime caps and disparities
 - Resolve issues of pay compression and lack of supervisory overtime
 - Reward exceptional performers more consistently and frequently

Focus Group Themes: Participants' Perceptions

Pay and Classification

- ▶ Expressed reservations regarding paybanding and other alternatives
 - Did not understand paybanding or the need for it
 - Need more information regarding how paybanding works
 - Need to provide supervisors with training and tools to enable them to accurately measure performance and apply pay decisions
 - Concerned about fairness
 - Individual-based pay for performance might not work for every job
- ▶ Any pay for performance system must have
 - Accurate standards and measures that are clearly communicated and understood
 - Regular and continuous feedback
 - Adequate funding to provide meaningful rewards
 - Checks and balances to ensure fairness

Focus Group Themes: Participants' Perceptions

Performance Management

- ▶ Perceive favoritism exists in current process
- ▶ Believe it may be difficult to measure/differentiate employee performance for some jobs
- ▶ Want consistent and fair process with relevant and clearly stated performance standards
- ▶ Want performance evaluated by those most knowledgeable of their work
- ▶ Want increased accountability for managing performance and ensuring assessments are fair, effective, and objective
 - Oversight through higher review levels or panels
 - Employee input regarding supervisor performance
 - Increased supervisory training
- ▶ Want supervisors to have adequate time to spend on performance management activities, including increased communication, coaching and career guidance

Focus Group Themes: Participants' Perceptions

Labor Relations

- ▶ Unions and collective bargaining rights should continue at DHS
- ▶ Expressed contrasting views about appropriateness of union representation in some parts of the organization (e.g., TSA)
- ▶ Want a labor/management relationship with two-way communications, teamwork, and non-adversarial problem solving
- ▶ Expressed contrasting views regarding a desire to reinstate partnership versus concerns about the effectiveness of these processes
- ▶ Want more training in labor relations, alternative dispute resolution, etc.
- ▶ Want a system that moves more quickly
- ▶ Expressed contrasting views regarding the need for flexibility in making personnel decisions during mission critical and emergency situations

Focus Group Themes: Participants' Perceptions

Discipline and Appeals

- ▶ Want a faster and fair process that includes
 - Defined timeframes that all parties must follow, including managers
 - Streamlined and simplified processes
 - Resolution of problems at the lowest level
- ▶ Want access to independent review
- ▶ Want more consistency in applying discipline
- ▶ Want management to deal more effectively with poor performers
 - Encourage supervisors to address performance deficiencies early on
 - Streamline the process to eliminate unnecessary complexity, paperwork and burden
 - Support supervisors' efforts to improve or address poor performance